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PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF THE 1932–1933 FAMINE TRAGEDY: AN EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RESILIENCE AND MORALITY IN THE CONDITIONS OF EXTREME SURVIVAL

Problem statement. The modification processes of society over the centuries have systematically demonstrated immoral actions targeted against humanity. Citizens were in the conditions of wildlife, when they survived by chance or the instinct of self-preservation was triggered. The issue of the 1932–1933 famine is gaining active attention in the twenty-first century. The terrible times when neither social nor legal laws work, when people are deprived of their rights and freedoms and are doomed only to death, can still be traced today. The times of the information society have not solved the problems of the twentieth century; the modern world considers the problem of famine in the context of a global problem. The famine of 1932–1933 was not a spontaneous phenomenon, as Soviet and later pro-Russian historians claim. The “starvation death” was the result of terror, in other words, genocide, deliberately used by the totalitarian government. It was a punishment for Ukrainians who resisted the collectivization of agriculture and did not want to recognize Russian rule. However, it is evident that resolving the Ukrainian question through such methods was impossible. The examination of the psychological traumas endured by the Ukrainian people during periods of terror – traumas that have transcended generations – is highly relevant.

An analysis of the latest studies and publications on the topic, focusing on previously unresolved aspects of the overarching issue addressed by the article. The main aspects of this issue are highlighted in the works of prominent historians, philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists. S. Kulchytskyi in his article “To Assess the Situation in Agriculture of the Ukrainian SSR in 1931–1933” initiated research among historians. R. Pyrih published a collection of

archival documents and materials. L. Kovalenko and V. Manyak collected eyewitness accounts in the book “1933: Famine: A People’s Memorial Book”. This topic is also discussed in the works by V. Serhiichuk, V. Marochko, I. Shulha, V. Kalinichenko, V. Ulianych, V. Tkachenko, G. Tsvengrosh, and other scholars. Foreign researchers, including R. Conquest, W. Chamberlin, J. Mace, R. Serbyn, and others, have also devoted their works to the study of the Holodomor. The concept of the “gray zone,” particularly regarding Holocaust victims who, for various reasons, collaborated with the Nazis, thus hastening their own extermination, is examined in depth by sociologist David Hirsch (born 1967) from Goldsmiths College, University of London [8, p. 92], and historian Martin Dean from the Center for Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. [7, p. 214].

The aim of the article is to provide a historical and philosophical retrospective of the Holodomor tragedy in the context of the existential aspect of human viability and morality in conditions of extreme survival, to analyze psychological and physiological resilience in conditions of total famine.

Summary of key research findings. The Holodomor can be considered a classic example of an existential crisis. The main factors that influenced the existential choice of Ukrainians during this tragedy were the policy of the Bolshevik regime aimed at destroying traditional social foundations, the rapid and gradual destruction of household structures, prolonged uncertainty and a real threat to the lives of a large number of people. All of this led to a sharp decrease in the opportunities for the artificially starved population of Ukraine. The Bolshevik authorities sought to make Ukrainians

indifferent to the suffering of the regime's "enemies" and to force them to support the ruling political force. From the point of view of existentialism, the key consequences of the Holodomor were the imposition of a sense of powerlessness, the leveling of spiritual values, and the spread of a sense of moral inferiority.

In his book "Black Earth", the famous American historian Timothy Snyder notes that the prerequisites for genocide are the collapse of the state system and the disappearance of the principles of legal protection of human beings. At first glance, this idea seems dubious, because the genocide of the Ukrainian people took place in the context of the strengthening of the Soviet state apparatus, which sought to extend its control over all spheres of life. Such a method as genocide becomes possible when the state apparatus is incapable of protecting citizens. The state apparatus, instead of protecting citizens, actively contributed to their extermination, which emphasizes the existential crisis in which Ukrainian society was immersed [1, p. 55].

The examination of the psychological traumas endured by the Ukrainian people during periods of terror – traumas that have transcended generations – is highly relevant.

Traumatic emotional reactions such as fear and helplessness can be transmitted between generations. In this case, the transmission of trauma occurred exclusively between the two immediate generations. Historical, cultural, and collective trauma, on the other hand, is associated with events that affect social life. In general, there are three types of intergenerational transmission of traumatic reactions: the first is the socio-cultural aspect, which is the transmission of beliefs about relationships, behavioral patterns and worldviews at the personal, cultural and social levels through communication, socialization, observation, imitation, care, education and social norms; the second is the epigenetic mechanism, i.e., the inheritance of changes caused by trauma by descendants (we are talking about changes in the nervous system of a parent who has experienced trauma); the third is the unconscious reproduction of parental behavior and attitudes (this type is associated with sociocultural and neurobiological transmission).

The psychological impact of the Holodomor on the future life of generations can be divided into cognitive (perceptions) and behavioral (coping strategies). Cognitive consequences are expressed in the way a person perceives and comprehends life, whereas behavioral consequences are expressed in the strategies used to solve problems and respond to events in the light of these interpretations. The prevalence of emotional instability (horror, fear, sadness, apathy toward others, anger, and shame) can lead to mental health problems (general stress,

anxiety, substance abuse) and requires separate consideration. The psychological and neurobiological components of these effects are difficult to separate, but they tend to decrease in intensity from generation to generation.

It should be noted that genocide is not the only method of destroying humanity. For example, Nathan Kellermann (Kellermann, 2013), a renowned clinical psychologist, psychodramatist, and sociodramatist, speaks of disturbances in self-awareness, cognition, emotional reactions, and interpersonal relationships among the descendants of Holocaust survivors, and L. De Gruy (De Gruy, 2005), an American researcher, describes an intergenerational trauma called "slave post-traumatic syndrome" as a set of behaviors and beliefs, such as a generalized self-destructive worldview, helplessness, and a disturbed concept of self. This type of trauma is characteristic of African Americans whose ancestors were oppressed (slavery, racism). The intergenerational transmission of traumatic worldviews and social attitudes is also demonstrated in Rachel Lev-Wiesel's (Lev-Wiesel, 2007) effective study, which describes three different cases of traumatic experiences of the first generation: genocide, prolonged stay in refugee camps, and forced migration from their native land. Representatives of the second and third generations experience constant sadness (due to the indoctrination of their ancestors who imposed the idea of "remembering and never forgetting"), anger at the inability to return to their homeland, and shame over their social status.

American historian and psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton studied the impact of mass traumatic experience on human consciousness in various situations (war, political violence, genocide). He concluded that those who have experienced collective trauma (life is threatened for a long time) feel the "stamp of 32 deaths" for the rest of their lives. This is expressed in a hidden sense of guilt for their own emotions and experiences. According to him, witnesses of mass deaths of other people often live with an inner sense of guilt due to the realization that they did not respond adequately to the suffering and death of others, and that their survival can be perceived as a privilege while others died. As a result, these emotions lead to the need to displace traumatic experiences from memory or even deny them [11, p. 134].

The fundamental feature of existentialism that determines its contribution to the development of philosophy is the recognition of man as a unique being whose existence is considered absolute. The main idea of existentialism is the search for essence through existence, which is even more pronounced in the French version of this philosophy. Existentialism emphasizes the absolute uniqueness of human existence and studies the individual living

person, not humanity as a whole. The tragedy of human existence is that it is always being absorbed by something – the family, the state, technological civilization, etc. Philosophy and literature intertwine the finitude and absurdity of human existence, the feeling of being lost in this world where people are constantly searching for meaning and struggling for self-awareness.

The existential crisis during the Holodomor manifests itself in a state of deep emotional shock and confusion when people are faced with the reality of collective suffering and death. Because of the senselessness and irrationality of their situation, people lose faith in the meaning of life. This crisis makes us think about fundamental ontological questions: “Why am I living?”, “What is the meaning of all this?”. This feeling is reinforced by constant fear for one’s own life and the lives of one’s loved ones.

The absurdity of the Holodomor is manifested in the feeling that life has lost its logical content and meaning. People tried to find logical explanations for what was happening, but were faced with a cruel reality. The destruction of a large number of people through artificially created famine symbolizes this absurdity. Therefore, their actions and thoughts became confused and uncertain.

In the context of the Holodomor, freedom takes on a dramatic meaning, as a person’s choices are reduced to extreme decisions. The choice between the morally right thing to do and survival at all costs becomes particularly difficult. Famine forces people to make choices that may contradict their moral principles and values. In this case, the freedom of choice becomes a tragedy, and each decision has serious consequences for the person and others.

Responsibility for the Holodomor has several aspects. First, it is responsibility for one’s own life and the lives of loved ones, and second, it is responsibility for the choices made in the face of famine. During the Holodomor, people faced moral dilemmas that forced them to make difficult decisions that contradicted their moral convictions. Being responsible for one’s actions in such an emergency makes a person question their moral values and ability to compassion.

Existential crisis, absurdity, freedom, and responsibility in the context of the Holodomor emphasize the tragedy of human existence, when human life is under constant threat, and every decision can have serious moral consequences.

Given the individuality of each existential choice, one should be very cautious about generalizing or establishing general patterns based on the analysis of human behavior during the Holodomor-genocide. There is always a risk of oversimplifying the past, when an entire nation or social group is assigned a single, simplistic role in certain

historical contexts. Such a simplistic approach is based on the assumption that all members of the group share common characteristics or traits that determine the behavior of each individual. The reality of the Holodomor-genocide was much more complex and did not lend itself to simplistic assessments. Generalizations and simplifications do not contribute to the understanding of the complex mechanisms and nature of the mass extermination of Ukrainians through starvation.

However, some conclusions can still be drawn. The existential aspect of the decisions that Ukrainians had to make during the Holodomor-genocide was, first and foremost, the destruction of a way of life. This way of life was destroyed not only because of the deaths of millions of its bearers, but also because of the conscious refusal of the survivors to continue this life. The goal of the state apparatus was to make the regime at least indifferent to the suffering of those it declared “enemies,” and at most gloatingly approving of the policy. Material deprivation was accompanied by a loss of self-respect, moral decay, and spiritual leveling [1, p. 57].

The planned Holodomor of 1932–1933 was not only a physical disaster but also a deeply psychological catastrophe. The mass deaths from starvation tested people’s ideas about the meaning of life and the value of human existence. It was during this period that Ukrainians realized that they were on the verge of survival, and their attitude toward life changed radically. The feeling that existence had lost its meaning became decisive for many.

The eyewitness accounts presented in the books by Robert Conquest (“The Harvest of Sorrow”) and Yurii Shevelev (“Through the Eyes of History”) demonstrate how the famine changed human nature. Hunger as a physical suffering became insurmountable and permanent, and the lack of food and resources turned life into an endless cycle of struggle for survival. This led to a crisis of meaning in life, and many people lost faith in the future and the possibility of improving their situation. The Holodomor led to the decline of moral and social norms, turning life into a struggle for basic needs. People who believed in humanism and social justice faced fear, despair, and suicidal thoughts. The daily struggle for survival created anxiety and depression, which shaped a new, cruel worldview. The testimonies of the period reflect the pervasive fear of imminent death that gripped all affected areas.

Viktor Frankl, in his writings on human survival in extreme situations, noted that despair and fear lead to “dehumanization.” In the case of the Holodomor, this manifested itself in extreme cruelty and chaos, when traditional social structures and moral norms were unable to provide psychological stability. Documents from NKVD (People’s Commissariat

of Internal Affairs), testimonial records, and the work of historians such as Volodymyr Vynnychenko show how extreme survival conditions led to moral degradation. Cases of food theft, violence, and even cannibalism described in testimonies from the period show how physical hunger erased moral boundaries. People were forced to make decisions that once seemed unacceptable. The Holodomor was a test not only of physical endurance, but also of moral and existential resilience. These catastrophic circumstances severed social ties and caused deep emotional conflicts, but even in the darkest times, humanity and morality found their expression. Literary and historical research confirms numerous examples of sacrifice and compassion that help us understand how moral values and the strength of the human spirit are preserved in the most difficult conditions.

The problem of survival turned out to be much more difficult for the majority. In the face of prolonged malnutrition, famine and exhaustion, each social, age and gender group made its own choices according to the circumstances. The starved people faced a choice: “die or escape,” but in fact it was a choice without freedom imposed by the regime. The majority of Ukrainians, especially peasants who resisted the political force, gradually lost their strength and became victims of starvation. Along with the famine, villagers were shot, arrested, and deported. Those who witnessed the forcible confiscation of bread and other products called the famine artificial. In the conditions of mass starvation, humanity was lost. James Mace notes that benevolence and sensitivity remained, but they were replaced by indifference and cruelty. Cases of cannibalism are interpreted as a method of self-preservation. Official reports have documented cases of cannibalism and corpse eating, which indicates a violation of Christian ethics and psychological norms. Hryhorii Bevz, who personally survived the Holodomor, notes that prolonged famine changes human psychology “Along with physiological changes in the body, a hungry person’s psychology changes as well. Severe and prolonged famine will strangle or kill ordinary human feelings and emotions. A hungry person rethinks such values as good, evil, truth, lies, justice, and injustice. Natural human values seem secondary, not worthy of attention. They come first: “More than anything, I am hungry”.

Conclusions. Through a historical and philosophical analysis of the Holodomor tragedy of 1932–1933, it becomes clear that the issues surrounding human existence and our place in the world were largely overlooked. A fundamental tenet of existentialism is the recognition of individuals as unique beings, with their existence viewed as absolute. The tragedy of human existence is that it

is often subsumed by family, state, or technological civilization. In this context, the Soviet political system neglected essential humanistic values.

Existential choice fundamentally involves the realization of human free will – the capacity to make independent choices, irrespective of prevailing conditions and circumstances. Philosophically, the question arises: are individuals truly free in their actions and decisions? During the Holodomor, individuals were constantly confronted with difficult choices, further complicated by their dire environment and living conditions. Survivors experienced profound emotional turmoil as the brutal reality of that time stripped life of its meaning.

As illustrated above, the existential dimension of decision-making during the Holodomor was characterized by a shift in lifestyle and living conditions, where survival took precedence. In their desperation, many individuals sacrificed ethical and moral values in the struggle to stay alive.

A modern analysis of the Holodomor requires a more detailed study of the social and economic causes of the tragedy. Historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists should join forces to understand the conditions of human survival in inhumane conditions. It is important to consider the impact of the Holodomor on modern Ukrainian society, which still bears the burden of the post-genocidal legacy.

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Summary

Zinchenko N. O., Kaiun V. O., Perun S. V. Philosophical aspects of the 1932–1933 famine tragedy: an existential analysis of human resilience and morality in the conditions of extreme survival. – Article.

The article examines the main problems of a philosophical nature through the prism of existentialism. Existential problems of human stability and morality in conditions of extreme survival during the Holodomor of 1932–1933 are considered and psychological and physiological stability in conditions of total hunger are analyzed. Traumatic emotional reactions such as fear and helplessness can be transmitted between generations. In this case, the transmission of trauma occurred exclusively between the two immediate generations. Historical, cultural, and collective trauma, on the other hand, is associated with events that affect social life. In the context of the Holodomor, freedom takes on a dramatic meaning, as a person's choices are reduced to extreme decisions. The choice between the morally right thing to do and survival at all costs becomes particularly difficult. The tragedy of human existence is that it is often subsumed by family, state, or technological civilization. In this context, the Soviet political system neglected essential humanistic values.

Existential choice fundamentally involves the realization of human free will – the capacity to make independent choices, irrespective of prevailing conditions and circumstances. Philosophically, the question arises: are individuals truly free in their actions and decisions? The existential aspect of the decisions that Ukrainians had to make during the Holodomor-genocide was, first and foremost, the destruction of a way of life. This way of life was destroyed not only because of the deaths of millions of its bearers, but also because of the conscious refusal of the survivors to continue this life.

The Holodomor was a test not only of physical endurance, but also of moral and existential resilience.

These catastrophic circumstances severed social ties and caused deep emotional conflicts, but even in the darkest times, humanity and morality found their expression.

Key words: existentialism, morality, choice, freedom, death.

Анотація

Зінченко Н. О., Кайун В. О., Перун С. В. Філософські аспекти трагедії голоду 1932–1933 рр.: екзистенційний аналіз людської стійкості та моралі в умовах екстремального виживання. – Стаття.

У статті розглядається основні проблеми філософського характеру через призму екзистенціалізму. Розглянуто екзистенційні проблеми людської стійкості та моралі в умовах екстремального виживання під час Голодомору 1932–1933 рр. та проаналізувати психологічну та фізіологічну стійкість в умовах тотального голоду. Травматичні емоційні реакції, такі як страх і беспорядність здатні передаватися між поколіннями. В даному випадку передача травм відбувалася виключно між двома найближчими поколіннями. Історична, культурна та колективна травма, з іншого боку, пов'язана з подіями, які впливають на суспільне життя. У контексті Голодомору свобода набуває драматичного значення, оскільки вибір, який мають люди, зводиться до екстремальних рішень. Вибір між морально правильним вчинком і виживанням за будь-яку ціну стає особливо складним. Трагізм людського буття полягає в тому, що воно завжди піддається поглинанню чи то сім'єю, чи то державою, технологічною цивілізацією тощо. В даному ж випадку гуманістичними цінностями знехтувала радянська політична система.

Екзистенційний вибір передбачає перш за все реалізацію свободи волі людини. Свобода волі – це здатність людини робити вибір самостійно, не залежно від умов та обставин. В контексті філософського трактування, свобода волі – це питання про те людина вільна у своїх діях та рішеннях. Екзистенціальний аспект рішень, які українцям доводилося приймати під час Голодомору-геноциду, полягав, насамперед, у руйнуванні способу життя. Цей спосіб життя був знищений не лише через загибель мільйонів його носіїв, а й через свідому відмову тих, хто вижив, від продовження цього життя.

Голодомор став випробуванням не лише для фізичної витривалості, але й для моральної та екзистенційної стійкості. Ці катастрофічні обставини розривали соціальні зв'язки, викликали глибокі емоційні конфлікти, проте навіть у найтемніші часи людяність і моральність знаходили свій вияв.

Ключові слова: екзистенціалізм, мораль, вибір, свобода, смерть.